

## Winter weather preparation

The impacts of winter weather conditions - wind, rain, and freezing temperatures - can leave your family isolated or in the dark for hours or days at a time. It's important to plan ahead so you are ready to take winter by storm. Take these simple steps:

1. **Make a plan.** Know how you and your loved ones will communicate when communication systems are down, and where you will meet if separated.
2. **Build a kit.** Include food, water, medications, toiletries, a first aid kit, flashlight and extra batteries, warm blankets and clothing, and other essential supplies for every member of your household (including pets). Keep a kit at home and in your car.
3. **Stay informed.** Monitor local radio stations for important safety information and updates. Be sure to have a battery-operated radio and extra batteries on hand.

It's also a good idea to get to know your neighbors. During winter emergencies you can help each other and share needed resources. Find more tips and checklists at [www.takewinterbystorm.org](http://www.takewinterbystorm.org).



## Freezing temperatures – Prepare your home

Winterize your home - protect indoor sink pipes that are against exterior walls by opening under-sink cabinet doors to allow indoor heat to circulate. During severe cold temperatures allow one indoor faucet to slowly drip cold water. Select the faucet that is the farthest from your front door. Do not leave water running in unoccupied buildings. Set your thermostat no lower than 55 degrees day or night (even if you are away). Prepare your pipes:

- Know where your shutoffs are. If an emergency occurs, you'll need to know how to shut off electricity, gas and water at main switches and valves.
- Protect water pipes from freezing in exposed or unheated areas (attics, basements and garages) by wrapping them with tape and insulating materials from hardware stores (follow manufacturers' installation instructions).
- Drain and remove all outdoor hoses.
- Caulk around pipes where they enter the house and close all foundation vents to minimize cold wind from blowing into your house. Pipes exposed to drafts from open foundation vents are most at risk of freezing or splitting during cold weather. Close off these vents by sliding cut pieces of wood or styrofoam into the vent openings (open the vents again in the spring to prevent dry rot).
- If you have a separate shut-off valve for outside faucets, now is the time to shut it off. Then go outside and turn on all faucets to drain the water out of the pipes.
- If you don't have a separate shut-off valve, wrap outside faucets or hose bibs (i.e. foam insulated covers are available for about \$3 at hardware stores).
- Shut off and drain in-ground sprinkler systems (follow manufacturer's instructions).

## Health and well-being

- Winter [shelter information](#) is provided by King County 2-1-1.
- Avoid accidental [carbon monoxide poisoning](#) (what it is and how to prevent it).

- Report power outages to your utility company – [Puget Sound Energy](http://www.pse.com) 1-888-225-5773 (select menu option #1) or by logging in to your *My PSE Account* on PSE.com  
[Seattle City Light](http://www.seattlecitylight.org) 206-684-3000.
- Report, and stay away from, all downed power lines – call your utility company.

## Pet Safety

Pets need extra care when temperatures fall. Give your dog, cat and other pets a safer, healthier winter season by following these suggestions:

- During cold, wet weather, keep pets inside or limit the time that pets stay outside. Provide outdoor pets with a dry, warm, secure shelter out of the wind such as a garage or insulated pet house. Even dogs that normally spend most of their time outside need good shelter in cold weather, even if it is only a garage.
- Gently towel or blow-dry your dog or cat if he or she gets wet from rain or snow. Check between the pads of their feet for clumps of ice or snow.
- Be alert to frostbite, which can be a winter hazard. Contact your veterinarian if you suspect your pet has frostbite. Frostbitten skin may turn reddish, white, or gray, and it may be scaly or sloughing.
- Cats and kittens often nap on warm car engines and hoods. Knock on the hood or honk the car horn before starting the engine.
- Pets like the smell and taste of antifreeze, but even a small amount can kill them. Clean up spills at once, and store antifreeze securely away from pets.
- Always have fresh, clean, unfrozen water available for pets. Your dog or cat is just as likely to get dehydrated in the winter as in the summer. Snow is not a satisfactory substitute for water.
- Keep your pet warm, dry, and away from drafts. Make sure your pets have blankets or pads on cold floors.
- Groom your pets. Pets need well-groomed coats to keep them properly insulated.
- Feed your pets extra food if they spend a lot of time outdoors or if your dog is a working dog – staying warm in cold weather requires extra energy.
- Consider a sweater for short-coated breeds such as greyhounds and Chihuahuas before taking them outside. Also, realize that if sweaters get wet, they can actually remove heat from an animal's body.
- Do not leave your pet alone in a car. It gets too cold and carbon monoxide from a running engine is dangerous.

## Winter Storms – What to do before and during a snow storm

- General safety tips – Washington State EMD link: <http://www.emd.wa.gov/preparedness/documents/ERG-46WinterStorms.pdf>
- Register for King County Metro Transit Alerts: <http://metro.kingcounty.gov/alerts>
- Register for regional alerts and warnings at [www.rpin.org](http://www.rpin.org).
- Check school closure information at [www.schoolreport.org](http://www.schoolreport.org).

## Driving in snow and ice

- If bad weather is predicted, check the forecast before heading out and adjust your travel plans if you can. If bad weather is forecast, consider postponing your trip.

- When traveling, be aware of ice hazards, especially on shaded roadways, bridges or in high elevation areas prone to freezing. So be on the lookout for black ice as well as snow.
- If you must abandon your car during a snowstorm, pull as far off the road as safely possible to avoid blocking other vehicles and snow removal equipment. Cars left in travel lanes may be towed and impounded.
- When key roads are closed due to snow and ice, access to communities can become severely restricted. Make sure to monitor road closures in your community and have a family back-up plan in case you are not able to get home.
- Equip your vehicle with all-season tires and carry tire chains. Know how to use your chains and dry fit them before storm season.
- Dress for the weather in case you become stranded and have to walk.
- Use caution when following a snowplow or sander by allowing at least two car lengths distance.
- Allow ample time to reach your destination.
- [Sign up for King County Road Alerts](#) to receive timely information about road closures or hazardous conditions that have a significant impact on roads in unincorporated areas of King County.